

Lesson Plan: Influencing the Agenda: The Impact of Interest Groups on Policy Making

This lesson is an extension of the previous activity. In this lesson, students consider the impact of lobbying efforts by interest groups and citizens. It can be conducted concurrently with the previous lesson, or it can be conducted as a follow-up lesson. If completed as a follow-up, allow sufficient time to debrief with the students on how public interest groups and lobbying efforts altered the legislative process. Be sure to have them reflect or comment on whether supervisor's votes changed after the lobbying took place.

Connection to POS: Standard 8.1

- ◆ *Students will explain the responsibilities of a citizen in the family, school, community, state, nation, and the world. (8.1.2.a)*
- ◆ *Students will realize the expectation that responsible citizens become informed about and involved with contemporary and continuing issues in civic life (8.1.3.a.)*
- ◆ *Students will describe how individuals participate in the political process by....communicating with government officials, supporting and working with political parties and interest groups....and attending meetings of governing bodies (8.1.3.c.)*

SOL Standards: 7.2.b, 7.3.a, 7.4.e, 7.9.a



Objectives

At the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- ◆ explain the ways individuals and groups can have an impact on County government.
- ◆ analyze the effectiveness of efforts to influence County government.



Materials

- ◆ Student Handout – Board of Supervisors Meeting Scenarios



Time Needed

- ◆ 90 minutes



Procedures

1. Refer back to Lesson Plan: *Fairfax County Board of Supervisors Meeting*. Assign remaining students who are not role-playing as supervisors to assume the role of concerned citizens and representatives of interest groups.
2. Among the many interest groups you might include are:
 - The Fairfax Education Association or the Fairfax Federation of Teachers
 - A member of the Police Union
 - An advocate for the homeless
 - A commercial developer
 - The American Automobile Association
 - A residential developer
 - An alternative sentencing advocate, representing recovering drug abusers
 - A neighborhood association representative concerned about high traffic
 - The membership director for the Chamber of Commerce
 - A handful of “everyday citizens”
3. After the Board Chair has presented each scenario listed on the Student Handout, invite comments from the citizens and interest groups. Have a podium set up before the “Board,” so that students must face them as citizens do at actual meetings. Allow each to speak for no more than three minutes in favor of or in opposition to any of the 10 proposed amendments.
4. After each board member has also had an opportunity to speak, the Board Chair calls for a vote.



Assessment

- ◆ For supervisors, have students write an evaluation of whether their votes would have been changed on any of the amendments due to the impact of citizen input. They must defend their answers.
- ◆ For the citizens and interest group representatives, grades can be based on their research and presentations.



Extensions

- ◆ Have students conduct research on some of the interest groups represented in the simulation. What demographic characteristics do members of that group share? What is their main goal? How **large** is the group? How **active** is the group in its lobbying efforts? Discuss the final two questions and have students reflect on how this would impact their effectiveness as a lobbying group.
- ◆ As in the earlier lesson, you could invite one of the supervisors to your school. This time, you may also wish to invite a representative of an interest group to your school to speak on the topic of effective citizen participation.



Differentiations

- ◆ You may wish to provide a list of guiding questions to help students conduct their research on the agenda of the interest groups listed. What issues are of greatest concern to this group? Which supervisors do they usually lobby? Which supervisors might/support or oppose this ordinance?
- ◆ Allow students who may be nervous about public speaking to consult notes and/or prepare their remarks beforehand. Give them an opportunity to practice in front of you or a small group before having to speak in front of the entire class.



Interdisciplinary Connections

- ◆ Work with the English teacher or drama/speech teacher to help students with public speaking and persuasion skills.